

Christiane Paul on Joseph Nechvatal

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Joseph Nechvatal, *the birth Of the viractual* (2001) 70x70"
computer-robotic assisted acrylic on canvas



Joseph Nechvatal, *vOluptuary drOid décOlletage* (2002) 66x120"
computer-robotic assisted acrylic on canvas

Precursors of the Post-Digital

The term post-digital and its related practices and discourse started to slowly emerge only from the mid-2000s onwards. Some artists had already been exploring the ways in which digital technologies offered new conceptual and technical ways of shaping painting, drawing, and sculpture at an earlier point. Artist Joseph Nechvatal's (b. 1951) 'computer-robotic assisted' paintings, for example, are created by means of a virus-like program that performs a degradation and transformation of the image. After digitally composing and manipulating image elements, most notably through the transformations induced by the virus, Nechvatal transfers his files over the Internet to a remote computer-driven robotic painting machine, which executes the painting. The artist himself is not involved in the process of painting itself, which ultimately takes place as an act of 'telepresence'. In paintings such as *vOluptuary drOid décOlletage* (2001) and *the birth Of the viractual* (2001), parts of the (intimate) human body are intermixed with flower or fruit ornaments into a virally created collage. The hybrid image suggests an androgyny that Nechvatal traces to Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, which depict transmutation as a universal principle driving the nature of the world. Nechvatal's paintings strive to create an interface between the biological and technological, the viral, virtual, and actual or 'viractual', as the artist refers to it.